CONSTRUCTING A PARADIGM OF LEVELS OF CONSCIOUSNESS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SELECTED POETICAL WORKS OF RABINDRANATH TAGORE AND SRI AUROBINDO GHOSE

A

Synopsis

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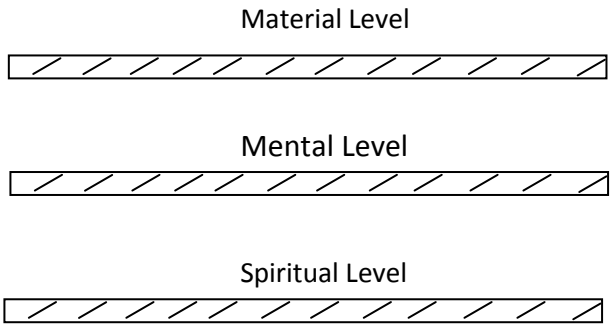
Since years the term ‘Consciousness’ has been a stirring concept for one to dive in to understand. It opens the doors towards the perception of a broad understanding. The Oxford Dictionary explains being conscious as being sentient which means having the ability to feel things around or being alert. It further directs us to the meaning ‘basic awareness of the surroundings.’ In different disciplines of knowledge the term consciousness is defined in different connotations. Science explores it as the awareness of all the influences of the outside world and how we perceive them or how they lay impact on us. On the other hand psychology goes ahead by exploring it as ‘an enquiry of our mind.’ It says that the intellectual construction of our mind demands something beyond the physical matter that appeals to our mental perception.

But it is interesting to observe that religious outlook has far wider and vast perception of ‘consciousness’ which varies from all the possible scientific studies for it goes beyond all the sciences. In sanskrit the term ‘Consciousness’ is defined as ‘CHAITANYAM’ which means ‘inner power of attaining bliss.’ The religious outlook says its wisdom is beyond all imagination and its possibilities are infinite. If we analyze the question ‘awareness of what?’ , we can observe three types of consciousness at three levels.



The first basic stage with reference to levels of consciousness is the material consciousness which is concerned with the physical aspect i.e., body. Eminent scientist

Charles Darwin analyses the level of consciousness which adhered to the basic awareness found in all. This level also includes social consciousness present in human beings.

The second level of consciousness refers to the mind. According to Sigmund Freud who is the Father of the Modern Psychology, our mind is structured in three stages.

1. Consciousness in wakeful stage
2. Sub conscious stage
3. Unconscious stage

First stage is adhered to the awareness of the physical needs and fulfilling them eventually. In the second stage we are conscious in our state of dreams. It comes to the awaken state when we are in sleep. It gives the revision of memories, the likes or dislikes which influence us in our wakeful state.

In the third level i.e., unconscious level, our mind is still active but gradually it declines to the first level, may be even more to the initial roots. It is conscious about hunger and it is responsive to the physical pain. Science and psychological sciences mainly emphasize these two levels majorly and their influence on our consciousness.

If we analyze the third level i.e., Spiritual consciousness , we perceive that it is the highest point of wisdom that our mind can possess and it aspires to uplift the spirit which can attain the experience of pleasure beyond the physical senses could feel. The spirit which is formed with the amalgamation of body and mind can be traced with the help of soul. If we analyze the origin of soul and its place of existence in our body, we perceive that soul is the part of its own fountain head which we can call as God. It is like the Man is a MICROCOSM of the God as a MACROCOSM. We are the speck of God and our soul resides in our body making our existence as a miniature of the creation above the layers of the universe. But we

are not conscious of exploring it. Rabindranath Tagore in his work *Sadhana* says that if we are conscious of our soul we can be transcended from ego and attain the ability to feel oneness with the God. We can understand that among all the creatures in this existence, only human being possesses the faculty of spiritual quest. The soul gradually realizes its origin and aspires to reach back its home. This can be called as spiritual consciousness in brief terms.

Analysis reveals that the first two levels are limited in scope. As we observe the progressive levels, the spiritual level has a boundless influence. It exists everywhere in the universe.

Since ages and centuries several scientists of the western land have been trying to understand the origin and abode of soul and expressed their view that it is not possible for an average man to perceive it. The Spiritual Science Research Foundation (S.S.R.F) opines that an average human being is at the ignorant level in the spiritual graph but we can find many great saints since Vedic and Upanishad times in India who have been gifted with enlightenment of their souls. They perceived and explored the layers of creation and attained the key for soul to go abode. They are placed above the level of 80%. Tagore says that we call them *Mahatmas* (the men of great soul).

If we observe the various fields of knowledge, literary field has the most descriptive and sublime expression of the concept of consciousness. Besides the saints, there are Seer poets and poets who expressed their levels of spiritual experiences through wonderful descriptions which are evident in their works. The great saint poets like Kabir Das, Tulsi Das, Sri Aurobindo Ghose , Meera expressed the transcendence of their souls to the higher regions.

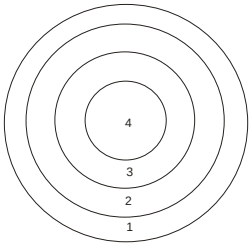
If we observe the words of Sri Aurobindo as quoted by Prem Tyagi , he says “ Since I set foot on the Indian soil on the Apollo Bunder in Bombay, I began to have spiritual

experiences but those were not divorced from this world but had an inner and infinite pervading material space and the Immanent inhabiting material objects and bodies."[1] We understand that the level of consciousness in such saints and seers is greatly higher for an average man to perceive. He further says, "Nobody can write my life because it has not been on the surface of a man to see."[2]

This level of higher consciousness has been found in many mystic poets. It reflects that these poets have experienced the great level of transcendence and tried to put them in words. From the west we have William Blake and others who felt the connection of the soul with God. But in Indian literature we find the seer poets who expressed far more powerful impact of spiritual experience on their soul. Rabindranath Tagore is one of the docile and sublime souls who experienced the spiritual growth and felt enlightened after experiencing the unified bliss of his soul with god. He says that human personality is transcendental and that it advances ahead to find its goal and he says that it is man's conciousness that stirs his mind and pushes him ahead to work upon his soul.

Sri Aurobindo defines consciousness in the broadest concept. He defines the planes of consciousness in four levels.

1. Higher Mind
2. The illumined Mind
3. The Intuitive Mind
4. The Overmind



[1] Tyagi, Prem. *Sri Aurobindo and Poetic Theory*. Meerut: Ashir Prakashan , 1988. 13. Print.
[2] Ibid., 6. Print.

Aurobindo says that in the first plane man becomes aware of the self and his outlook and perception of the surroundings is elevated with thought – power. He says that the Higher Mind is the initial spiritual plane. He refers to literature in this context and says that a sublime work of literature arises out of illumined mind which falls in the second plane. The third plane according to Aurobindo is the level in which we feel the elevation of our inner eye. The last plane according to him is the most powerful one and is essentially filled with the surcharged spiritual energy and bliss which experiences the universal delight. Sri Aurobindo says that these planes are the real source of literary inspiration which is evident in his wonderful and highly enlightened works *Savitri*, *Life Divine* etc.

Rabindranath Tagore was born in Calcutta on 7th May 1861 in the family of Debendranath who was called Maha Rishi. Tagore was fortunate to be born in a family with enlightened minds and progressive approach to education in multi dimensional fields.

Tagore was a versatile genius whose literary areas are multifaceted. He started writing short stories in 1801with his work *The Baby's Return*. Later he wrote many plays like *King and Queen, Sacrifice,* etc. He wrote a volume of verse called *Sonar Tari*. He further composed *Sandhya Sangeet, Prabhat Sangeet, Manasi, Sonari Tari, Chitra , Naibedya,* etc. After the demise of his wife in 1902 Tagore wrote *Smaran* as her memory. Later he wrote *The Cresent Moon* to entertain his children, which carries tender lyrics of love and affection.

His compositions expanded far beyond the expressions of his feelings regarding the material aspects but they seem to be the finest reflections of the spiritual development of his soul. They gradually took birth in the form of *Gitanjali* (1910), *Gitimalya* (1914), *Gitali* (1914) . In this trio his unity with the God is reflected. They begin with the sublime experience of the divine bliss and reach the height of intuitive experience. These songs of offerings brought him the Nobel Prize.

If we observe his beautiful work *Gitanjali* which was published in English in 1912, the finest of Tagore as a person and as a seer can be extracted. We observe that W.B.Yeats says that the poems of *Gitanjali* have stirred his blood as nothing for years. *Gitanjali* is a beautiful mixture of sublime themes that reflect his love for the divine. The lyrics show the relationship between God and the human soul, God and Nature and also the relation between nature and human soul. But the work majorly reflects the highest level of consciousness in man who wishes to get reunited with the God.

Tagore's another work *Fruit Gathering* was first published in 1916 which is a beautiful collection of eighty - six poems among which fifty poems are of religious temper collected from *Gitimalya , Gitali , Utsarga , Kheya , Naivedya* and *Gitanjali* . The rest of the poems are extracted from *Katha* and *Balaka* . This unique piece of work is indeed a fruit gathering of the tender feelings of love, great feeling of courage and underlying love for the Divine.

Tagore's next work *Crossing*, published in 1918 is one of the beautiful works. It contains seventy - four religiously tempered poems.We observe that many of the poems of this translation are transcreations and paraphrases of the original. These poems are from *Naivedya, Kheya, Gitanjali , Gitimalya and Gitali* . They do not seem like mere collection of the songs but each sonnet - like structure is suffused with highly sublime thought and expression which lead us to the identification of the Almighty by the end of the journey. If we observe his words we perceive that Tagore's soul is highly enlightened and it is the source of his beautiful creation like *Crossing*.

It is highly moving to perceive that each work of Tagore is the reflection of his own spiritual journey which began from the catharsis of his pain and reached to the realization of

his bond with the God. This reflects the level of consciousness attained by the Gurudev to a great height.

When we observe the literature of the Mysticism and spiritual experience Sri Aurobindo Ghose comes as the greatest Seer poet who himself was a 'Rishi' and composed his divine experiences in the form of literary works which stand as the most sublime collection all over the world. Sri Aurobindo was born on August 15, 1872 in Calcutta to Dr. Krishna Dhan Ghose and Mrs. Swarnalata Devi. He started writing poetry when he reached his sixteenth year which went on throughout his life. Aurobindo was a complex personality who could not be clutched in words to explain. Since Aurobindo came back to India after long time in England, he had a special feeling for our mother land and it gave birth to the political quest in him which stirred him to do something great for the nation. But soon he felt that his soul had been experiencing the supernatural effect in him. He says that he gradually saw his soul getting connected to the God. He says "…Day after day He showed me His wonders", says Sri Aurobindo,… things were opened to me which no material science could explain".[3]

If we see the works of Aurobindo we can divide them in three phases. In his early phase, the first work *Songs of Myrtilla* was published in 1895. Then he further wrote some poems which were published as *Poems* (1905). These poems reflect Aurobindo as a great philosopher. The poet gradually grew as a great narrative poet who created the greatest works like *Urvasie, Love and Death, Baji Prabhou* and *Illion* . *Savitri i*s the greatest poem among all his works which stands unique in its theme and form. The middle phase of his career mainly consists of his other poems which are published as *Poems* (1941), *Last Poems* (1952) etc. In the last phase, the lyrics majorly carry the mystic and meditative experiences of

[3] *Sri Aurobindo: The Story of his Life.* Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1972. 51. Print.

Aurobindo. His area of literature is multifaceted which also covers Drama, Verse Translations, Prose works and several letters he wrote to the Mother.

Aurobindo's works are filled with the depth of spirituality which is the reflection of his own progressive levels of consciousness. He says, " Everything I wrote came from yogic experience, knowledge and inspiration, so too my greater power over poetry and perfect expression was acquired…from the heightening of my consciousness…."[4] . It is because of this he is called a poet of the cosmic mysteries.

If we observe his work *Savitri* , we see that it is the Legend and crown of all his works . It is the greatest epic poem with twelve books divided in fourty - nine cantos that make up twenty four thousand lines. It is based on the episode of *Mahabharata* which shows the power of the love and chastity that can win over death itself. Aurobindo symbolizes Savitri as the incarnation of the Mother itself. We perceive that *Savitri* is not limited to the life sketch of a character but Aurobindo took it to the intense experience of the highest level of the consciousness. Dr. Nikhil Kumar quotes from one of the letters of Aurobindo, " In fact, *Savitri* has not been regarded by me as a poem to be written and finished , but as a field of experimentation to see how far poetry could be written from one's own consciousness and how that could be made creative." [5]

Book Three and Book Seven of *Savitri* take us to the height of the spiritual journey. Book Three (The book of the Divine Mother) explores the quest of the spiritual bliss. The cantos begin with 'The Pursuit of The Unknowable' and progresses to the exploration of spirit and the vision. Book Seven explores the search of the soul and describes about the salvation. It rises to the discovery of the cosmic consciousness.

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[4] *Sri Aurobindo: The story of his life.* Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram. 1972. 86. Print.
[5] Kumar, Nikhil. *Sri Aurobindo's Yogic Consciousness & Poetry.*Patna. Novelty & Co. 2007. 1. Print.

Sri Aurobindo's *Collected Poems* is a volume of all the poems he composed in his life and published by himself in English. These poems are grouped into seven parts which include short poems, lyrical poems, sonnets and several poems written as experiments. This collection includes two hundred poems which reveal the experience of heightened consciousness felt by Aurobindo.

Rabindranath Tagore and Sri Aurobindo are literary figures who share the contemporary age. They are gifted with a noble vision and high level of divine inclination. They realised the supremacy of God since the very beginning of their life. Tagore's works grew from the level of catharsis to the realization of God. His works reflect the tender emotions and the unification of his soul with the God. When it comes to Aurobindo we discover that he was more than a poet. He goes beyond the common place poetic sensibility. His works reflect that he did not aim at composing a work but they are the flow of his own experiences of travelling into the inner regions of the soul and the words were the outflow of his yogic experiences and realizations which are hard to perceive for an ordinary man. *Savitri* is the best example to show his level of work which was not a formal composition but it was the flow of his yogic experiences written in words. When we observe the works of Tagore, we can see the beauty of composition and a flow of thought which any reader can understand. *Gitanjali* is the classic example which reveals an underlying divine supremacy perceived by him. Tagore's works are simple and yet suffused with the divine beauty. Aurobindo's works are beyond the level of a common man to perceive their inner meaning. We observe that Aurobindo was a Rishi and all his actions of life were driven ahead by the Divine command and his works were thus a flow of his inner experiences rather than a flow of poetic thought. But the beauty of their works lie in an equal pedestal because both of them have experienced the awakening of their inner soul and their works reflect their levels of consciousness. Aurobindo being a Rishi, the levels may certainly vary.

If we observe the researches done on the concept of consciousness it has taken a great wave of researches all around the world. Many parts of the West have been exploring the concept, forms and levels of consciousness. We can observe several researchers whose researches are collaborated into a book *Cambridge Handbook of Consciousness* like Uriah Kriegel, Georges Dreyfus , Drew Mc Dermott and many others. We can also observe the *Spiritual Science Research Foundation* from the West which has been exploring the concept of consciousness in depth. When it comes to the concept of consciousness in literary field, there are many researchers who explored the works of Seer poets and writers. Many researches have been performed on the great poets like William Blake all over the world. When it comes to the Indian literary research, many researchers have been exploring the works of saint like poets Kabir Das, Tulsi Das which reflect the highest levels of consciousness expressed in the form of literature. In the nineteenth century we find Sri Aurobindo, a great example of Seer poet who stirs all the field of research with great enthusiasm till today. His works reflect the vivid description of the levels and planes of consciousness which he himself experienced. The research house 'Sabda' of Sri Aurobindo Ashram , Pondicherry is ever active with many researches exploring on Aurobindo. M.P. Pandit, Prem Tyagi, Dr. Nikhil Kumar, etc. are the great researchers who explored the yogic consciousness of Aurbindo. Many of them worked on *Savitri* which is the most complicated work that reflects the highest level of consciousness. One of the researchers Prema Nandakumar worked on *Savitri* and explored the philosophical depth and symbolism in it which is described in his article *Sri Aurobindo's Savitri.* Dr. Nikhil Kumar in his book *Sri Aurobindo's Yogic Consciousness and Poetry* (2007) explores the levels of Aurobindo's consciousness reflected in *Savirti*. To understand the levels of consciousness in the journey of the poem *Savitri*, Dr. Nikhil Kumar says, "We shall have to discover the psychic self and bring our mind under its command for a true vision of the Divine, though this vision will

continue to be an eclipsed one till we cross the frontiers of mind, for mind is the divisive principle of consciousness."[6] Sri Aurobindo gave a new level of poetry to supramental height. He concludes , " English Poetry, thus, comes to transcend the limits of this dimensional world in such an expression of the truth of the supramental." [7]

The works of Tagore also have been explored by many researchers like K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, Sisirkumar Ghose, Bhabatosh Chatterjee and many more. Sabyasachi Bhattacharjee , a great researcher explored and analysed the works of Tagore in his book *Rabindranath Tagore: an Interpretation* (2011) and brings out the essence of his spiritual inclination. It is interesting to see that the researchers from the West have been even more enthusiastic to work upon Tagore like Rothenstien, George E. G. Catlin etc. who explored the relationship between man and the universe reflected in the works of Tagore.

The concept of consciousness has always been a hard nut for many wise researchers and scientists to crack. Although many of us know what it indistinctly is , yet we feel hard to describe. For some it is purely a physical phenomenon and for some it is purely psychological. For most of us it is hard to perceive or explain in words about the whirlpool within us. This ultimately goes beyond the experiments and it is purely experiential and self confined. This drew the grave attention of the researcher when the researcher observed the experiences of Sri Aurobindo described in his words which hint us that his level of spiritual consciousness is the highest among men. The levels of consciousness are explicitly described in his poems. Rabindranath Tagore also described the unification of his soul with the Divine power. The present study will explore the vast field of consciousness and its levels described as various fields of knowledge in the works of Sri Aurobindo and Tagore which bring out the experience they must have felt while travelling into the inner regions of their soul and felt

[6] Kumar, Nikhil. *Sri Aurobindo's Yogic Consciousness and Poetry.* Patna: Novelty & Co.2007. 6. Print.
[7] Ibid., 99. Print.

unified with the God. Taking the underlying base of spiritual consciousness, exploring the works of these Seer poets whose works came from the highest level of their soul perception would be extremely enthralling to work upon. It will be the most intriguing and riveting work in the field of research which will pave a new path in the literary research taking it towards the spiritual height.

The objectives of the proposed study would be:

- To explain the term of consciousness
- To trace the roots of mysticism
- To analyze the levels of consciousness in the Poems of Rabindranath Tagore and Sri Aurobindo Ghose
- To make a comparative study of Tagore and Aurobindo with special reference to their levels of consciousness.

The proposed chapters would be as follows :

Chapters – I : Introduction

Chapters – II : Evolution of Mystic Tradition in Indian English Literature

Chapter – III : Analysis of the Poems of Rabindranath Tagore

Chapter – IV : Analysis of the Poems of Sri Aurobindo

Chapter – V : Comparitive Study of Tagore and Aurobindo

Chapter – VI : Conclusion

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